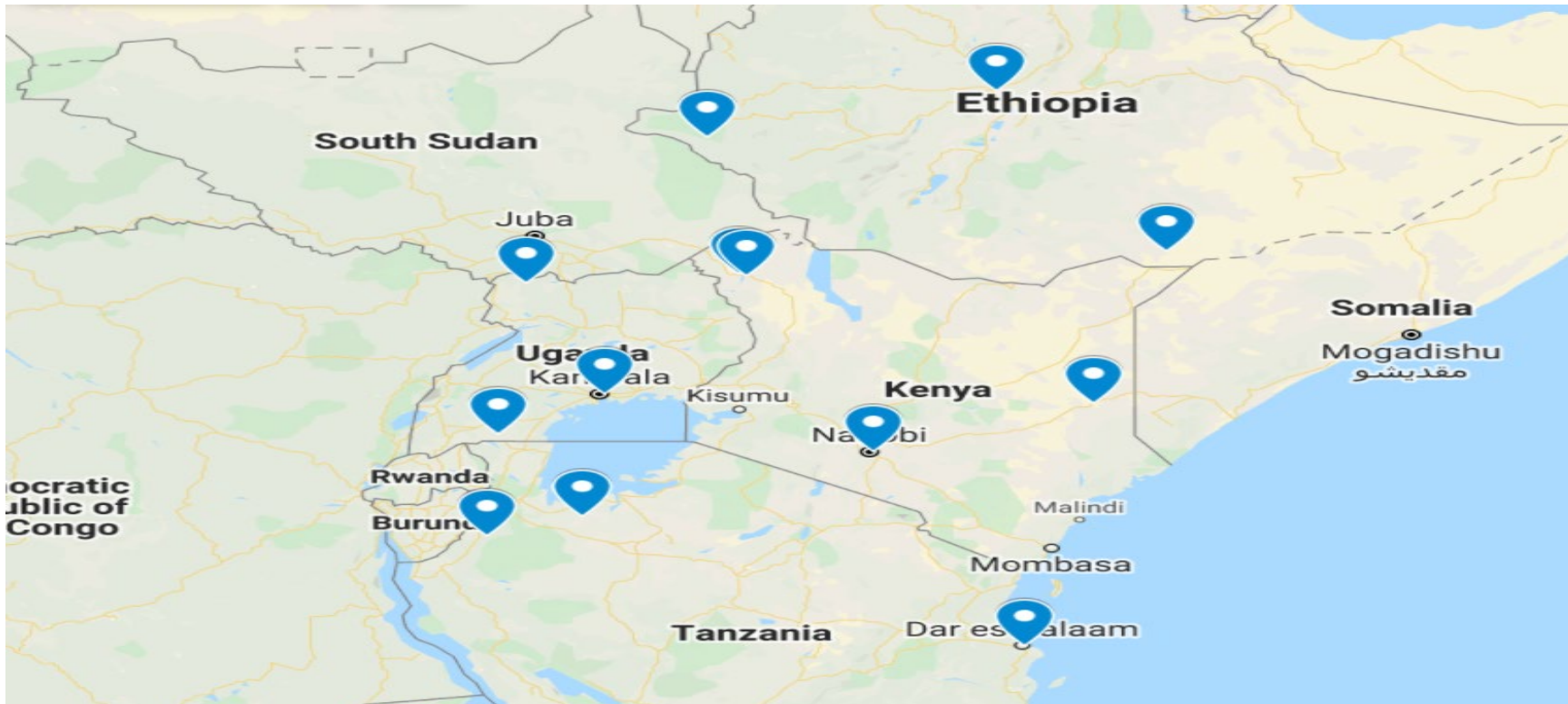


Challenges facing RLOs in supporting refugees' livelihood

Background

- This presentation is based on a study on refugee-led organisations (RLOs): their nature, responses, and perceived impact on displaced communities in East Africa (Kenya, Uganda, Ethiopia, Tanzania)



Back ground

- Based on emerging evidence that RLOs in East Africa play a vital role in meeting community needs (more effective, efficient and legitimate).
- A study by Carleton University through the Local Engagement Refugee Research Network (LERRN) and in partnership with the Refugee-Led Research Hub (RLRH) of the Refugee Studies Centre (RSC) at the University of Oxford.
- Led by refugee researchers, from start to finish.

What are RLOs?

- RLOs include any organisations, associations, coalitions, formal or informal networks, faith-based groups and initiatives led by refugees or asylum seekers in urban, rural, camp and settlement settings. They may be registered or unregistered groups.
- Their function is to respond to the humanitarian, developmental or cultural needs of refugees and related host communities. They support their own members (self-help groups), their communities (special interest groups, ethnic groups), other refugees and the host community.
- RLOs may provide direct services or focus on advocacy. They may have for-profit elements, but those are used (fully or partially) to fund not-for-profit activities.

Stages of development

- **Self-help phase:** Informal groups that aim at providing services to their members who are not registered. During this phase, RLOs are mostly dependent on member contributions. They may also engage in income-generating activities, where profits are distributed between RLO activities and members.
- **Growth phase:** CBOs that have registered and are able to provide services to both their members and their community (typically along ethnic lines). RLOs are able to engage with diaspora members, individual sponsors and, in some cases, humanitarian donors.
- **Expansion phase:** NGOs or larger CBOs that provide services to refugees regardless of their ethnic affiliation and to the host community. Humanitarian funding is generally received through an international non-governmental organisation (INGO) intermediary, and outweighs membership fees and diaspora support. Even in their expansion phase, RLOs rarely access direct philanthropic funding.

Experiences with RLOs

- Across organisations, beneficiaries speak positively about their experiences with RLOs.
 - RLOs treat them with more dignity;
 - are better understanding of and adapted to their needs;
 - provided fairer service delivery; are more accessible and less bureaucratic; enable more direct communication;
 - are more open to serving unregistered refugees;
 - provide better paid opportunities for volunteers or staff.

Perceived impact of RLOs

- Beneficiaries note that RLO services have impacted their well-being and self-reliance.
- This is particularly the case for marginalised or otherwise excluded beneficiaries or when the RLO provides a service which might not be legal.
- Positive impacts include the provision of micro-loans and emergency support; skills training; orientation and information; culturally appropriate mental health support; and community cohesion.
- A minority of respondents noted negative impacts, which include concerns over ethnic favouritism and RLOs functioning in a self-serving capacity for leaders.

Challenges

Each state's regulatory framework affects RLOs in different ways.

- RLOs in Uganda and Kenya can operate openly even without registration, although it hinders access to funding.
- Unregistered RLOs in Ethiopia and Tanzania are unable to operate safely, and experience difficulty in opening bank accounts to receive funds.
- Despite significant progress and support from a range of stakeholders, registration in all four countries remains a challenge for RLOs led by refugees with low literacy levels or limited education, who lack networks with area chiefs and refugee supporting institutions, and who might not have funds to move from the camp/settlement to the relevant office.

Need for – and challenges with – partnerships

- Meaningful engagement remains sparse. In Uganda and Kenya, RLOs implement projects on behalf of INGOs on a short-term basis, the parameters of which are often pre-defined by aid organisations. In Ethiopia and Tanzania, partnerships largely consist of small-scale in-kind contributions.
- RLOs are more likely to access partnerships when they are registered, have an online presence, have professionally connected leaders and can advocate publicly for inclusion.
- In Tanzania and Ethiopia, the restrictive environment does not grant RLOs power to contribute to discussions on localisation or on setting priorities for the refugee response.
- Under funding, as noted by an ODI report: 10 times less than host country organizations

Q&A

Thank you for your attention and please let be in touch!

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